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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iran Afghanistan Italy
PARIS - Thursday, April 13, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iran
Afghanistan
Italy

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

The tug-of-war between the West and Iran is today's lead story in Le Figaro: "Military Option Against Iranian Threat." The front-page story analyzes how Washington "is in favor of force" while Europe "would prefer sanctions." Either way, Le Figaro acknowledges: "Teheran Is Taunting the West." Inside, the two-page report includes a story on how the U.S. is "evaluating a military option to counter Iran," one on the various scenarios the Pentagon has been "studying" for a "U.S. military air strike campaign" and also the possibility of a "solo Israeli operation." The editorial is entitled "Iran Toys with the West." Alexandre Bouilhet reports on the EU's "preference for gradual sanctions." Liberation reports that "for Washington, Tehran has crossed the yellow line." (See Part C) Interviewed in Le Figaro, Kuwait's PM says: "The Iranians are very clever. They will go as close to the precipice as they can before stepping back at the last minute to negotiate. They want to be in a position of strength when they face the Americans. It is understandable. They are very smart. Believe me, I have met Ahmadinejad and he knows what he is doing."

Liberation devotes its lead to Afghanistan and "The Awakening of the Taliban." "After four years, western troops, for the most part French, are unable to deal with the guerrilla resurgence." The editorial compares their task to Sisyphus and his rock. (See Part C)

The editorial in Le Monde, entitled "Two Italys," contends that while Prodi has won "the mathematical and political right to govern" it will be difficult. (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iran

"Iran Toys With the West"

Pierre Rousselin in right-of-center Le Figaro (04/13): "Each time Iran crosses the yellow line in its nuclear program, the West must take an equivalent step backward. The extremists who lead Iran have understood that they have everything to gain from playing this game. While Teheran cannot yet produce the bomb, being able to produce enriched uranium is a slap in the face of the UNSC, with immediate guarantees of having an effect. The Iranian message to the world is very clear. and includes the question 'why Israel and not Iran.' The questions raised by Tehran are basic ones raising real issues and which no one dares answer. In Washington, Paris, London and Berlin, everyone prefers talking about sanctions, even if everyone knows they will either serve little purpose or if they are effective, will trigger an Iranian response that could really hurt. Because the sanctions blackmail is not working, the threat of a military intervention is being raised. Last week's stories in the U.S. press are part of the equation. And it could be that Teheran responded with its own daring about uranium enrichment. While this game goes on between the West and Tehran, countries in the region must be drawing their own conclusions. Arab opinion is sensitive to the notion of 'double standards.' Europe's image, like that of the U.S. is falling fast. To come out of this impasse we must find better than sanctions and military threats. We must rethink the non-proliferation regime completely and engage in negotiations with Iran: these two initiatives are essential. But a weakened America and a paralyzed Europe are not up to this."

"For Washington, Iran Has Crossed the Yellow Line"

Jean-Pierre Perrin in left-of-center Liberation (04/13):

"Probably for domestic reasons, the Iranian regime has decided to continue to challenge the international community. Their recent declarations have triggered protests from the

international community, including from Russia and China. even if they continue to be opposed to the use of sanctions. It is clear that a race is on between the Iranian leaders in their provocations to the West and all for domestic consumption. Meanwhile the Iranian declarations are a godsend for the American administration because uranium enrichment represents a 'yellow line' which should not be crossed, as Secretary Rice reminded everyone. To increase the West's concern, Under Secretary Rademaker said in Moscow that the Iranians would be

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able to build a nuclear bomb within 15 months. But Washington does not know how to respond to Tehran's challenge. Diplomatically, Washington will be hard pressed to find a consensus on the use of punitive measures against Iran. At the military level, an operation seems out of the question because of the consequences for the region and the fear of reprisal in Iraq. In fact Tehran does not seem to be taking the threats seriously. Meanwhile both Iran and the U.S. appear bent on a confrontation, particularly since Washington refuses to talk directly with Tehran."

Afghanistan

"Sisyphus"

Patrick Sabatier in left-of-center Liberation (04/13): "Some one thousand French soldiers are engaged in Afghanistan along with American and European soldiers. Some are dying while there is no end in sight to the intervention. Four years after the end of the Taliban regime, extremists continue to hamper Afghanistan's reconstruction while they lead in a reign of terror. The conflict is a low intensity one, and Karzai's regime has not been threatened. But one has to wonder about the usefulness of the intervention, like all military interventions in foreign lands . by western powers, which see themselves as the sheriff of the world. Reconstruction of a nation, which has been destroyed or has never really existed is, if not impossible, a very long-haul affair. The right to intervene against a regime accused of genocide is not in question here. The 2001 intervention in Afghanistan was both legitimated and necessary. But stabilizing such a backward country where armed militia reign under orders of war lords and drug lords, is like Sisyphus pushing his rock. Changing regimes is easy, as in Iraq and Afghanistan. Building a new one can never be the job for foreign hands."

Italy

"Two Italys"

Left-of-center Le Monde in its editorial (04/13): "Prodi has a political right to claim the role of President of the Council. Mathematically, he has very good chances to be named by both houses. But the left has failed to turn the elections into an anti-Berlusconi referendum. Meanwhile 'Il Cavaliere' has lost his power, although he has not been completely eliminated. and 'Il Professore' will need to be extremely clever in order to satisfy the very contradictory demands of his majority. While the task will be difficult, the Europeans have every reason to be hopeful now that they have gained a faithful partner committed to Europe." STAPLETON